



April 2010

By now, the weather is finally nice enough for many of us to shed our layers of winter clothing and head outdoors for some eagerly awaited sunshine. As you embrace all the fun spring and summer can bring, whether it's lounging by the pool or hitting the open road for the season's first motorcycle ride, I ask that you keep risk management in mind and "Play It Safe."

These days, our Soldiers are working hard and often playing harder. Our men and women in uniform are releasing stress and filling off-duty hours with activities like rock climbing, motorcycle riding, road trips and sports. All these great events are perfect opportunities to create lasting memories with friends and Family but, without proper planning and risk management, have the potential to cause serious trouble for our Army team.

Historically, our off-duty fatality rates inevitably increase from April to September. In fiscal 2009, almost 40 percent of our fatal accidents occurred during this timeframe, with privately owned vehicle (POV) and motorcycle accidents leading the way every month. We don't like to see these statistics, and the U.S. Army Combat Readiness/Safety Center team stands ready to help our Total Army Family bring these numbers down.

April 1 marks the official launch of our 2010 Safe Summer Campaign, and we need each of you to Play It Safe in everything you do these next few months. This year's campaign is packed with information and interactive multimedia you can use to build a personalized safety program tailored to your unit's needs. Campaign products, including feature articles, posters and public service announcements covering more than 20 summer safety topics, are all available via the "Campaign Corner" at <https://safety.army.mil>.

Our Army achieved some impressive milestones during last year's campaign, including our first accident- and fatality-free Memorial Day weekend in more than 20 years. I'm proud of this outstanding effort, but to make this our safest summer yet, we need to look at the lessons learned from last year's accidents. Several are particularly disconcerting, but they provide important talking points our Leaders, Families and peers can use as they engage with their Soldiers on off-duty risks.

One of last summer's earliest motorcycle fatalities involved a 26-year-old sergeant who lost control of his newly purchased motorcycle on a curve. The Soldier locked the bike's front brake as he attempted to regain control, causing the rear wheel to lift off the ground. He was thrown from the motorcycle with such force that his helmet came off, completely exposing his head to the asphalt roadway.

This accident highlights a crucial problem we've had with motorcycles over the past few years: Leader indiscipline. Not only was the Soldier involved a Leader, he bought the motorcycle from another sergeant within the unit. The Soldier was also dangerously inexperienced; he received his motorcycle learner's permit the day he died, and he hadn't attended the mandatory Basic RiderCourse. Since neither Soldier reported the sale of the bike to the chain of command, there was no higher-level intervention that might have saved this young sergeant's life. Both were Leaders and both knew better, but neither played it safe.

As dramatic as most POV and motorcycle accidents are, we can't forget about other activities that have historically been problem areas during the warmer months. We lost three Soldiers to drowning between April and September last year, all on fresh water lakes or rivers. Another three Soldiers died in off-duty negligent discharge accidents, all involving privately owned weapons and occurring in the late evening or early morning hours. There was also a smattering of other accidents that, while isolated, all resulted in a Soldier's untimely death. These incidents included a sport parachuting accident, a fall from a moving vehicle and a bicycle collision.

This diverse collection of accidents proves all of us — Leaders, Families, civilians and peers — must put our ears to the ground and listen to what our Soldiers are saying. Plans don't happen in a vacuum, and chances are many of your Soldiers are talking about their off-duty lives while they're at work. It's up to us to help them Play It Safe by giving them the tools they need to succeed not only this spring and summer, but every day of the year.

Thank you for what you do every day for our Band of Brothers and Sisters. Enjoy the weather, but remember to Play It Safe!

Army Safe is Army Strong!

WILLIAM T. WOLF
Brigadier General, USA
Commanding